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## Inclusive education of pupils with special educational needs in Czech Republic primary schools

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### Abstract

The current trends in the education of individuals with special educational needs (= SEN) include their inclusion in ordinary life, i.e. also into the mainstream education system. Within the inclusion, there is a "fusion" of the so-called minority (i.e. Individuals with disabilities / special educational needs) and majority (i.e. intact population / intact peers). Based on the data gathered so far in the context of this research related to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in Czech Republic primary schools (n= 500), we can say that a negative attitude prevails in teachers and executive workers of primary schools in relation to the inclusion of pupils with SEN. It also shows that Czech Republic primary school teachers fail to realistically define the difference between integration and inclusion of pupils, i.e. pupils with SEN. In relation to the problematic aspects of integration/inclusion of pupils with SEN, the respondents of the questionnaire survey/primary school teachers and managers often point out on the large numbers of pupils in primary school classrooms, they also refer to problems relating to the staffing of inclusion (note: teaching assistant is missing, there are problems with funding teacher assistants), the lack of primary school teachers in relation to the knowledge of the specifics and needs of children/pupils with SEN, as well as minimal knowledge of methods and procedures for working in an inclusive environment. Other problematic areas with the inclusion of children of school age is the lack of funds for supportive measures and the unpreparedness of the social environment/surroundings (intact children - classmates and their parents) to accept the children/pupils with SEN. The detailed analysis of the respondents' answers indicate that those respondents who already have (their own) experience with the integration of pupils with SEN state, among other things, have far fewer barriers towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN and they are mostly positively inclined to integration. Based on the pilot study and initial data collection via the questionnaire method, it is still impossible to objectively answer the research question regarding a statistically significant association between respondents' experience with the integration of pupils with SEN in primary school and their relationship to the inclusion of children with SEN in primary school, it cannot be generally answered on the basis of the pilot study and the initial data collection carried out by the questionnaire method.

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**Keywords:** inclusion; special educational needs; teachers; primary school.

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## 1. Introduction

The current trends in the education of individuals with special educational needs include their inclusion in ordinary life, i.e. also into the mainstream education system. (Bendová, 2014) The term "inclusion" (from the Latin "inclusio") can be loosely translated as inclusion or adoption into a unit, i.e. In the case of persons with disabilities in the general population, and within the educational context to a regular school. The aim of inclusive education is to ensure equal access and opportunities to education for every individual (Lazarová, Pol, 2002), including children / students / individuals with SEN (= with special educational needs), regardless of the form of their specific needs. (Booth, Ainscow, 2007) Within the inclusion, there is a "fusion" of the so-called minority (i.e. Individuals with disabilities / special educational needs) and majority (i.e. intact population / intact peers). (Slowik in Bendová in Skutil, Zikl et al., 2011) The inclusion entails a reform of the entire education system (i.e. not reformed special education). (Jones, 2004) In the context of education of children / pupils with special educational needs we talk about the so-called inclusive classes that represent the educational environment that is open to all without any discrimination and prejudice (i.e. to children with special educational needs, as well as socially disadvantaged children, foreigners, etc.) (Berberichová in Bendová in Skutil, Zikl et al., 2011) Inclusive classrooms, among others, also generate an appropriate educational environment for gifted and extremely talented children. (Havigerová, 2011)

The basic characteristics of inclusive education include the fact that inclusion takes place in schools in the place of residence of the children/pupils with SEN, and in classes that correspond to the age of pupils, while an appropriate place for teaching pupils with SEN is considered to be a normal class (i.e. a pupil with SEN does not leave the classroom/lessons, their teaching is not implemented "in an office"). Teachers, family and other people participate on the concept of inclusive education, who communicate with each other and in relation to education they look for an optimal method of education for a pupil with SEN in automatically ensuring adequate and sufficient "resources", i.e. quality teachers, necessary tools, support personnel (such as special school - teaching assistants, personal assistants, as well as for example, therapists). In the course of teaching for pupils with SEN the modification of the curriculum is used, which is part of the individual plan. Inclusion is based on the fact that each student has their own needs as well as skills that should be developed in a way that e.g. corresponds to their learning style and special educational needs. (Květoňová et al., 2009) Inclusive classes provide children with SEN (although not only them) the opportunity to learn together with their peers, learn in heterogeneous groups (note: part of social learning), to engage in education in a way that suits their skills and needs, in a safe environment, which enhances their self-esteem and self-confidence. (Maddux, Winstead, 2012) The teacher has the mediatory role whereby they actively teach children (note: they are not only a mentor). (Tassoni, 2003) In assessing the degree of environment inclusiveness (i.e. current status, perspectives), it is necessary to analyse the relevant components, i.e. ethical, sociological, professional, political and practical component. (Lechta, 2010)

The quality of the school is assessed according to the school's degree of capacity to reflect the individual (special) needs of pupils. (Machů, Kočvarová et al., 2013)

It should be noted that the current educational model from kindergarten to secondary schools in the Czech Republic only gradually accepts the pro-inclusive measures, and that in this area we are currently facing many organisational, legal, personnel, material, expertise (especially methodical-didactic) deficiencies. In order to eliminate the shortcomings as well as increasing the quality of inclusive education, the Czech Republic government generated and accepted the "National Action Plan for Inclusive Education" (NAPIE) for primary and secondary schools, and among others, the Support Centre for Inclusive Education was developed. (Bendová, Čecháčková, Šádková, 2014) The practice of inclusive primary school teachers shows that pupils with SEN cannot be treated as a homogeneous group (note: which is amongst other things, one of the characteristics of an inclusive class/lesson). The needs of individuals with SEN are absolutely individual at any age. (Maddux, Winstead, 2012) It is particularly necessary to take into account the psycho-motor, language and personal development of individuals with SEN. (Jordan et al., 2009) Children/pupils (including those with special educational needs) learn in different ways, at different speeds, among others they differ in their family backgrounds, and therefore it is important not to make conclusions only on the basis of their mother-tongue, culture, social or ethnic origin, or the type and degree of disability. It is always necessary to analyse in detail their special educational needs and planned support of a pupil with special educational needs and to plan the progress their education especially in close partnership with parents, as well as for example workers of school counselling facilities and school counsellors. (Lukas, 2012) In practice, this means creating such an educational environment and select such a style of education which corresponds to the needs of individual pupils and classes, as well as their families. In an inclusive environment, in relation to individuals with SEN (or also to their legal representatives) there is a widely known activation approach applied, which, among other things, is reflected in the quality of life of individuals with SEN and possibly also for their family members. (Matoušek et al., 2013)

## 2. Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

Due to the fact that in the Czech Republic the societal as well as political tendency supporting lifelong "pro-inclusive" education of pupils with special educational needs is currently growing, it is necessary to map the readiness of individual school grades in the area of the inclusion of children/students/individuals with special educational needs. In relation to the target group of children with special educational needs, then it is necessary to define the problem areas of school (and not only school) inclusion, and then subsequently focus the attention on them under sub-system measures, as well as within the undergraduate or postgraduate training of primary school teachers as well as special education teachers profiling in relation to the integration/inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in consulting services. Inclusion is a relatively new topic in the field of special education in the Czech Republic, and among others, so far there has not been an adequate amount of research surveys of a global character implemented, which would report on the readiness of primary schools on the inclusion of pupils with SEN. Many teachers and special education teachers cannot define fundamental differences in the area of integrative and inclusive education. The differences, which should be part of the transition from integration to inclusive education trend of pupils with SEN in school practice, are defined in the table below.

Table No. 1: Typical characteristics of integrated and inclusive education (not only) for pupils with special educational needs

Integration	Inclusion
focus on the needs of an individual with disabilities	focus on the needs of all students
expertise of specialists	expertise of current teachers
special intervention	good teaching for all
benefit for the integrated pupil	benefit for all pupils
partial change of environment	total change of school
focus on the student with disabilities	focus on a group and school
special programs for a student with disabilities	overall strategy of a teacher
student evaluation by an expert	teacher's assessment, focus on educational factors

(Jones, 2004)

The purpose of the present research survey is to comprehensively map the current situation in selected areas of inclusive education of pupils with special educational needs in primary schools in the Czech Republic, i.e. in the field of: a) primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education; b) the conditions for inclusive education; c) the methods and forms of work leading to inclusive education. To define the problematic areas of inclusion of school aged children with special educational needs in the Czech Republic, to familiarise them with professionals in the Czech Republic (as well as abroad),

respond to them at least at the level of the Department of Primary and Pre-primary Education of Hradec Králové University and the Department of Special Education and Speech Therapy, by conceptual changes to the content of undergraduate curriculum of teachers/special education teachers, in both undergraduate as well as master form of study.

### 3. Research questions

The aim of the research is:

- ✓ To map the attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education of pupils with SEN;
- ✓ To describe the risks of inclusive education of pupils with SEN in terms of primary school teachers;
- ✓ To map the current state in the area of the use of work methods and forms aimed at inclusive education in primary schools in the Czech Republic;
- ✓ To map previous experience of primary school teachers in relation to the integration of pupils with SEN.

To answer the research questions:

- ✓ Does positive attitude towards inclusion of pupils with SEN prevail among primary school teachers?
- ✓ Is there a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' experience with integration of pupils with SEN in primary schools and their relationship to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in primary schools?
- ✓ Do primary school teachers consider the unpreparedness of teachers (i.e. low knowledge of methods and procedures for working in an inclusive environment) as the most serious (most frequently mentioned) barrier to inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools?

The questionnaire, which is the main methodological tool of this research, should lead primary school teachers to reflection and self-reflection in relation to the method of education of pupils with SEN. Specifically, it concerns the answers to the questions such as: Am I able to identify the specific needs of each pupil and respond to them through appropriate teaching approaches and strategies?; Am I able to co-operate with the management of primary school, colleagues, parents and the wider community?; Can I prepare a plan or a longer-term strategy for the education of a heterogeneous class of pupils in primary school?; Can I analyse the learning processes of individual learners and change teaching strategies if they appear to have little effect?; Can I set up an individual educational plan for the education of pupil/s with SEN?; Can I formulate my expectations, which are related to the benefit of primary education for each individual student?; Can I be flexible, creative and nimble in educational situations?; Will I be forced to change "something" /"What"/ in my next educational practices and strategies? (Hájková, Strnadová, 2010)

### 4. Method

As part of the research survey the methods of quantitative research with qualitative elements (note: a mixed research design) are utilised. From a methodological point of view, questionnaire and observation methods were used.

The questionnaire survey is carried out in the period between June and October 2014. As part of this survey, primary schools across the country are addressed. The research respondents are teachers (or Headmasters/mistress) of primary schools.

The questionnaire used for data collection is anonymous. Self-identification of respondents is only based on the identification of regions, where the primary school is located. Data of a factual nature are determined by semi-closed and closed items within the questionnaire. Opinions of the teachers (or the executive workers) of primary schools are among others further mapped through scales - scale responses.

To specify and complement the current situation in the field of inclusive education of pupils with SEN the observational arch is used. Within the observations in particular the forms and methods of work applied in primary schools are evaluated to support the inclusive education trend (note: direct participant observation).

After completion of the research survey, standard methods for quantification of the results of educational research will be used to evaluate the data.

## 5. Results

Due to the fact that the data collection using the questionnaire method and observation method is currently still ongoing in Czech Republic primary schools (i.e. it is not yet complete), it is only possible to present partial outputs of this survey. The presented information is based mainly on the analysis of data obtained within the initial pilot study, then from responses gathered so far by the questionnaire and from the so far realised observation. Therefore, the research survey results cannot be generalised at this moment. However, the responses obtained by the analysis of the first 500 responses/questionnaires can be considered as relevant within the research in relation to the issue.

In relation to primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, based on the answers to the questions below, we can state that teachers occupy a more negative attitude to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in primary schools in the Czech Republic.

- ✓ Am I able to identify the specific needs of each pupil and respond to them through appropriate teaching approaches and strategies?

I am unable	I am more unable	my skills/ competencies are average	I am more able	I am able
82 respondents	93 respondents	144 respondents	78 respondents	25 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

- ✓ Am I able to co-operate with the management of primary school, colleagues, parents and the wider community?

I am unable	I am more unable	my skills/ competencies are average	I am more able	I am able
0 respondents	36 respondents	198 respondents	126 respondents	138 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

- ✓ Can I prepare a plan or a longer-term strategy for education of a heterogeneous class of pupils in primary school?

I am unable	I am more unable	my skills/ competencies are average	I am more able	I am able
4 respondents	23 respondents	278 respondents	177 respondents	18 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

- ✓ Can I analyse the learning processes of individual learners and change teaching strategies if they appear to have little effect?

I am unable	I am more unable	my skills/ competencies are average	I am more able	I am able
19 respondents	72 respondents	249 respondents	158 respondents	2 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

- ✓ Can I set up an individual educational plan for the education of pupils with SEN?

I am unable	I am more unable	my skills/ competencies are average	I am more able	I am able

3 respondents	97 respondents	243 respondents	125 respondents	32 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

✓ Can I formulate my expectations, which are related to the benefit of primary education for each individual student?

I am unable	I am more unable	my skills/ competencies are average	I am more able	I am able
18 respondents	95 respondents	345 respondents	16 respondents	26 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

✓ Can I be flexible, creative and nimble in educational situations?

I am unable	I am more unable	my skills/ competencies are average	I am more able	I am able
0 respondents	7 respondents	258 respondents	194 respondents	41 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

✓ Will I be forced to change "something" in my next educational practices and strategies?

I will be forced	I will be more-likely forced	my skills / competencies in the area are average	More-likely I will not be forced	I will not be forced
33 respondents	58 respondents	238 respondents	167 respondents	4 respondents
$\Sigma$ 500				

In relation to ensuring optimal conditions for the inclusive education for pupils with SEN, primary school teachers point to a different extent (on a scale from 0-5) especially on the elimination of classes with a large number of pupils (95% of respondents), as well as eliminating the problems associated with staff provisions for inclusion, with the utilisation of the work position of teacher assistant (98% of respondents). Furthermore, they point to the need to eliminate a primary school teachers unpreparedness in relation to knowledge of the characteristics and needs of children with SEN (90% of respondents), as well as minimal knowledge of methods and procedures for working in an inclusive environment (89% of respondents). Other problematic areas with the inclusion of pupils in primary schools indicated by the primary school teachers/questionnaire respondents is the lack of financial resources for supportive measures (94% of respondents) and the lack of preparedness of the social environment/surroundings (intact children and their parents) to accept pupils with SEN (64% respondents). Furthermore, as obstacle in inclusive primary education of pupils with SEN, 78% teachers/executive workers of primary schools mention insufficient coverage of intervention by experts from school advisory facilities (i.e. pedagogical-psychological counselling, special education centres) in relation to the promotion of education for pupils with SEN, furthermore, they then point to the persistence of architectural barriers (60% of respondents) and 42% of them mention the reluctance of teachers to the accept changes that come with inclusion.

In relation to the improvement of supportive measures in primary schools, primary school teachers would welcome the provision of a teaching assistant (98% of respondents), methodological pro-inclusive education of teachers (90% of respondents), supporting methodological materials (70%), improvement of the intervention of specialists from SEC and PPC specialising in children with SEN (78%), the possibility of supervision (75% of respondents), changes to legislation (88% of respondents).

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the data gathered so far in the context of this research related to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in Czech Republic primary schools, we can say that a negative attitude prevails in teachers and executive workers of primary schools in relation to the inclusion of pupils with SEN. It also shows that Czech Republic primary school teachers fail to realistically define the difference between integration and inclusion of pupils, i.e. pupils with SEN. In relation to the problematic aspects of integration/inclusion of pupils with SEN, the respondents of the questionnaire survey/primary school teachers and managers often point out on the large numbers of pupils in primary school classrooms, they also refer to problems relating to the staffing of inclusion (note: teaching assistant is missing, there are problems with funding teacher assistants), the lack of primary school teachers in relation to the knowledge of the specifics and needs of children/pupils with SEN, as well as minimal knowledge of methods and procedures for working in an inclusive environment. Other problematic areas with the inclusion of children of school age is the lack of funds for supportive measures and the unpreparedness of the social environment/surroundings (intact children - classmates and their parents) to accept the children/pupils with SEN. Detailed analysis of the respondents' answers indicate that those respondents who already have (their own) experience with the integration of pupils with SEN state, among other things, have far fewer barriers towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN and they are mostly positively inclined to integration (note: experience with the integration of children with SEN in primary schools has been experienced by 74 teachers/managers of primary schools making up the research sample, i.e. 14.8% of respondents). Based on the pilot study and initial data collection via the questionnaire method, it is still impossible to objectively answer the research question regarding a statistically significant association between respondents' experience with the integration of pupils with SEN in primary school and their relationship to the inclusion of children with SEN in primary school, it cannot be generally answered on the basis of the pilot study and the initial data collection carried out by the questionnaire method. Comparing the findings of the investigation focused on the inclusion of pre-school children with SEN, which the author of the text implemented in 2013/2014, (Bendová, Čecháčková, Šádková, 2014) the overall readiness of primary school teachers in relation to inclusive education of pupils with SEN is at a much lower level, which also applies to the pro-inclusive attitude of teachers/managers of primary schools, knowledge of methods and forms of work with pupils with SEN and so on. This fact is obviously very closely related to the self-reflection of teachers, as well as with their intention to manage to respect the special educational needs of pupils with SEN and create an optimal educational environment for them in that direction.

It can be concluded that the research outputs implemented in primary schools will be supplemented by additional data obtained during September-October 2014, and these findings will be implemented in the text of this paper and presented at the ICCEPSY Conference on – 22-25 October 2015.

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